

Bald Eagles Return to the National Arboretum

For the first time in over six decades, the bald eagle is nesting at the National Arboretum. Absent from all of the District of Columbia until 2000, the bald eagle's last known nest site in the city was on the top of the Arboretum's Mount Hamilton. Remarkably, the current pair selected a site similar to the one volunteer John W. Taylor, Jr. described in his [1947 Arboretum bird list](#) as "on a hill near Bladensburg Road" with "a magnificent view of the city of Washington."

First Sightings

Last fall, DC's Department of the Environment wildlife biologist Dan Rauch observed the mating flights of a bald eagle pair near Kingman Island, a large island to the south of the Arboretum in the Anacostia River. Then someone reported the male eagle carrying a stick, a sign that he was building a nest. Further activity wasn't noticeable in December, but by early January, Arboretum staff notified Rauch that an eagle pair had chosen a tall tulip poplar tree on the south side of Mount Hamilton—one that had a view of the river as well as downtown DC—in which to build a nest.

Rauch, whose job includes surveying animal populations on Arboretum grounds, began to help monitor the new Arboretum nest in January. Based on the eagles' behavior, he believes the female laid her eggs in late January. Currently, the eagles are exhibiting behavior consistent with eaglets being present. Confirmation of eaglets will have to wait until an eagle nest survey is conducted via helicopter in the next week or so. It will take about four weeks before the eaglets' presence is apparent from the ground. The chicks would be ready to fledge in late June or early July.

Read [Dan Rauch's detailed account](#) of the eagles' mating and nesting.

Nest and Surrounding Area Protected from Disturbance

[Although the bald eagle is no longer an endangered species](#), it is protected under the [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) and the [Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act](#). Both laws prohibit killing, selling, or otherwise disturbing eagles, their nests, or eggs. To comply with these Acts the Arboretum is relying on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's [National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines](#) which call for a buffer zone roughly 660 feet in diameter surrounding the nest site. [Signs posted at roads and trails](#) will alert visitors to this [off-limits area](#).

Though the eagles could hardly have known when selecting their tree late last fall, they will be surrounded by explosions of azalea color sometime in late April and early May. Their tree is located on the western edge of the Arboretum's famed [Glenn Dale azalea collection](#), the destination of springtime visitors to the Arboretum since 1949.

The presence of the bald eagle nest so close to Azalea Drive along the south side of Mount Hamilton means the road will have to be closed to vehicles. A smaller segment of Azalea Drive will be closed to pedestrians because it is within the buffer zone. Visitors will still be able to explore most of the Azalea Collections from the east side trailheads, however.

Follow the Eaglets' Progress

While visitors will not be able to see the nest itself, they can follow developments through [pictures](#). In the likelihood that the eagle pair will return to the nest again next year, the Arboretum hopes to install a web cam after the nesting season so the eagles' activities can be viewed by everyone. In the meantime, see what's happening in the [eagle nest at Shepherdstown, WV](#).

[Eagles at the National Arboretum Fact Sheet](#)